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SUBJECT: GAO POLICE BLOTTER: MORE GRENADES AND CARJACKINGS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00003

[1](#)B. 08 BAMAKO 00482

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) On January 7 a grenade exploded in the northern city of Gao, killing one and wounding three children. According to the Malian government newspaper l'Essor, the incident occurred near the offices of the Dutch development agency SNV. A second, unexploded grenade was reportedly found in courtyard of one Amadou Guindo, also on January 7. Guindo may be a member of the Malian security forces in Gao, although we have no further information on this person as of yet. On January 9 another unexploded grenade was found near the wall of a security installation in Gao. These incidents followed the New Year's day grenade attacks in Gao that targeted the residences of three Tuareg leaders (Ref. A).

2.(SBU) Two vehicles were also stolen in Gao on January 7. One of these belonged to the Dutch development agency SNV and was taken four armed and masked assailants who reportedly scaled the wall of the SNV office within the city limits of Gao. A locally hired SNV guard was reportedly blindfolded but left unhurt. The other stolen vehicle was an ambulance belonging to a local association in the village of Talataye, about 100 km due east of Gao. This vehicle was also reportedly stolen by several armed, and masked, individuals.

3.(C) On January 10 a group of primarily Songhai youth held a protest march against the proliferation of grenades and the organization of para-military militias. The militia protesters seemed to have in mind was not the Ganda-Izo, which is suspected of perpetrating the grenade attacks, but the Imghad Tuareg militia led by Malian army Col. Elhadj Gamou. The Malian government has used this militia to combat Tuareg rebels (Ref. B). There are also indications of the formation of incipient Arab militias in the Gao and Timbuktu regions (see Ref. A). Police officers flanking the demonstration fired tear gas when the protesters tried to enter the compound of the Governor's office in Gao. Stone throwing reportedly ensued, resulting in several light injuries and broken car windows. A handful of protesters were arrested and later released.

4.(C) Comment: Malian officials suspect the January 1 grenade attack was orchestrated by the primarily Peuhl and Songhai Ganda-Izo militia. An official told the Embassy on January 9 that an investigation into the New Year's day attacks was just getting underway now. There is no indication of who was responsible for the January 7 and 9 grenade incidents, or the two carjackings. While carjackings are not uncommon on unpaved roads north and east of Gao, it is unusual for bandits to commandeer a vehicle in the center of town. Most NGOs park their vehicles inside the police station compound in Gao each night. This practice has been on going for several years as a security precaution. If SNV was keeping its cars at its office instead of at the police compound, it

is possible that armed bandits saw SNV as a target of opportunity. However, international donors have also lost vehicles while parked overnight at the Gao police station.

5.(C) Comment continued: The general security situation in Gao appears to be deteriorating. On January 9 the French DCM contacted the Embassy to relay French concerns about security in Gao and inform us of the planned protest demonstration. On January 12 officials at the Dutch and Belgian Embassies in Bamako also shared with us concerns about increased instability in Gao. The Governor of Gao, Amadou Baba Toure, has been absent from Gao for several weeks and was promoted from Colonel to General around the New Year. As a newly minted General, Toure will not return to Gao as Governor. One Malian official told the Embassy that the Chef d'Etat Major of the National Guard, Col. Bourlaye Kone, topped the short list of those likely to be tapped to replace General Toure in Gao. General Toure has been Governor of Gao since February 2003 and played a role in negotiating the release of a group of German tourists captured by the GSPC, now known as AQIM, in 2003. Many also suspect Toure of involvement in northern Mali's rampant drug and gun trade. Whether this allegation is accurate or not, Gen. Toure spent five years erecting an extensive, mostly personal, security network across the region of Gao. His departure from the Governor's office may provide a security vacuum easily exploited by those seeking to sow further disorder.

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